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Grey Foundations in Information Landscape: A report on the 9th International Conference on Grey Literature, Antwerp, 10-11 December 2007

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Paper type

Conference report.

From time to time we hear that the Internet is the solution for grey literature¹ and that there is no longer a problem with this somehow exotic and obscure material. Some people even seem convinced that grey literature simply no longer exists and that we should stop worrying about it.

Unfortunately, the reality is different. Grey literature (GL) is and remains well on the agenda of the information professional and scientist as a problem for the whole value chain of scholarly and technological communication.

The 9th International Conference on Grey Literature (GL9) that took place in the House of the Flemish Province in Antwerp, Belgium, 10-11 December 2007, provided evidence that the worry about grey literature is not over and that information professionals should stay aware of the specific challenges raised by reports, conference proceedings, theses and dissertations, working papers etc.

Dr. Dominic Farace from GreyNet/TextRelease (<http://www.textrelease.com>), organizer of the GL conference series since 1993, labelled the topic of the 2007 conference as “Grey Foundations in Information Landscape”. The goal was to map the infrastructure in which grey literature (GL) is embedded. Professionals and academics from 18 countries and 50 organisations attended. The conference was hosted by the Department of Economy, Science and Innovation (EWI) of the Flemish government.

¹ “(Grey literature is) that which is produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body.” (6th International Conference on Grey Literature New York City 2004)

The keynote speaker was C. Lux, Head of the Central and Regional Library Berlin and President of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). She defined four “hot spots” for the library:

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1. the preservation of primary research data sets,
2. the evaluation and analysis of major digitisation projects,
3. the evaluation of scientists through papers deposited in open archives (OA),
4. the development of shared standards for the research “cyber-infrastructure”.

The fourth topic was the subject of K. Jeffery’s (UK Science and Technology Facilities Council and EuroCRIS) opening paper on “Greyscape”, an architecture model of current research information systems (CRIS) that integrates documents in open repositories, data sets and software (“e-research”), institutional, project and personal information. Coherence and interoperability are facilitated through the Common European Research Information Format (CERIF), the OAI Protocol for Metadata Harvesting and a workflow system linking the different elements of the whole system. The CERIF format received an in depth presentation on the second day of the conference by B. Jörg from the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence. This format is recommended by the European Commission as a standard for recording research information.

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The first session (*chaired by J. Gelfand from University of California, Irvine*) on tools for publishing, archiving and accessing grey literature was opened by E. Dijk from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). KNAW and Dutch universities are involved in numerous programmes on Accessing grey literature in an integrated environment of scientific research information. Indeed grey literature represents 30% of the entries in DAREnet. Their latest project, a Digital Author Identifier (DAI) resulted in many questions from the audience about privacy issues.

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M. Stempfhuber from GESIS / Social Science Information Centre next showed us how to enhance visibility of grey literature by integrating it in the SOWIPORT Information Cycle.

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Based on user surveys SOWIPORT, the new portal in social sciences, offers access for all to grey and white literature, both databases and fulltext, cross-searches and web 2.0 technologies through intelligent integration.

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D. Luzi representing a group of three authors from the Italian National Research Centre (CNR) gave us an assessment and ideas for improvement of a corporate research information system. After two years of operation RisOSH (Research Information System in Occupational Safety and Health) definitely needs more promotion and support from administrations besides encouragements to increase input.

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In her paper “Open access to full text and ETDs in Europe: improving accessibility through the choice of language?”, C. Stock from INIST-CNRS showed that access to the full text of ETDs is more heterogeneous than ever, due to embargos and confidentiality issues. One way to increase the visibility of doctoral dissertations is to write them in English.

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The use and impact of grey literature in scholarly communication in the second session was presented through four approaches. A group of three authors from Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione e le Politiche Sociali (CNR) asked themselves if grey documents are ever cited. In a citation analysis on the impact of Grey Literature in the web environment using Google Scholar they discovered that grey documents are indeed cited, and no difference with white literature exists for highly cited documents. Only when multiple versions exist does Google

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Scholar give preference to the white version. In terms of currency grey literature in this analysis is "younger" than commercial documents.

In conjunction with the conference host J. Schöpfel (INIST-CNRS) reported on a survey on grey literature on bilingualism in Belgium. Using commercial and open sources and looking at the first author, he found that 30% of the documents are only grey. A follow-up survey based on journal titles showed that about 15% of these grey documents on bilingualism were published as white up to four years later, providing more evidence for the better currency of GL.

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C. de Blaaij from the Public and Academic Library of Zealand in the Netherlands chose a less usual category for his paper: The use of GL in historical journals and historical research: A bibliometric and qualitative approach. In a discipline where monographs are more important than journals and older material is not really obsolete, the distinction between grey and white is less important than between primary and secondary sources. A comparison between print and open access journals showed that grey literature is more frequently cited in the latter category.

Finally Bharati Sen from SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, India presented some case studies on Grey literature for development. She stressed the importance of making grass-root level reports widely available and cited the examples of women's studies and crisis management, situations where the social knowledge contained in those reports is much needed.

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Starting day two of GL9, the topic of session three "Grey Literature in Central and Eastern Europe" was made possible by the sponsorship of GESIS; accordingly it was chaired by A. Wenninger from the GESIS Service Agency Eastern Europe. In his opening paper "Digital Documents in Grey Literature: New Challenges", L. P. Pavlov from VNTIC, The Scientific and Technical Information Centre of Russia presented a project to move Russian PhDs (30 000 per year) to a digital environment and the challenges they have to face: the lack of standards, laws in need of revision, author's reluctance to move to digital format, and problems of dissemination which the internet could solve.

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M. Nahotko from Jagiellonian University at Cracow, Poland, introduced to different types of grey literature which are important in the Polish historical and economic context: underground literature (1939-45, 1946-89), reports and other documents for small firms, translations and local journals.

The session was concluded by P. Juznic from the University of Ljubljana with an overview on Grey Literature in Slovenia. A survey on 24 specialized libraries revealed that most of them hold collections of grey literature. 60% of the grey documents are catalogued in COBISS (the online bibliographic system) and searchable through the OPAC, but access is often restricted to consultation at the library; moves to the internet and an open environment are slow.

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Grey literature has always played a major role in the High-Energy Physics research community. In session four, A. Gentil-Beccot from the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) communicated the first results from a survey on information discovery behaviours and tools from more than 2,000 scientists and provided evidence that "community-driven resources" (e.g. preprint servers, open archives) are used much more than commercial services. In the same session, P. Sturges and L. Cooke from Loughborough University described community-based case studies on the production, use and function of grey

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documents in police services, in a specific legal and political context (UK Human Rights Act, Freedom of Information Act, Public Interest Disclosure Act). Setting new frontiers for grey literature, a group of four librarians from the University of California at Irvine analysed content features and metadata tagging in collaborative virtual reality (Second Life) as new forms of grey documents (J. Gelfand, D. Peterman et al.).

The conference concluded with a panel session on education and grey literature. D.L. Rabina and D. Farace presented two surveys on grey literature in library and information science education in North America and eight European countries, stressing that more formal training on GL in library schools and LIS university departments are needed. D. Farace also described a pilot course on grey literature in cooperation with other professionals and EBSCO and implemented in 2007 via distant education for upper-level undergraduate students at the University of New Orleans. First results are promising, and the pilot course (which included assigned readings, a case study and the design of a research proposal on grey literature) may fulfil its purpose as a model for similar projects.

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Other projects and new services were presented in eight poster presentations and product reviews, especially from the Japan Science and Technology Agency (Science Links Japan, a gateway to Japan's STI and grey literature), the New York Academy of Medicine (a new resource guide for public health preparedness) and the Italian National Research Council (CNR repositories).

A research team from the University of South Florida (T.A. Chavez et al.) received the 2007 GreyNet Award for their contribution to the field of grey literature, "The impact of grey literature in advancing global Karst research".

After the second day, the GL community had opportunity to meditate in the historical De Koninck brewery about a common feature between grey documents and Belgium beer, e.g. their ephemeral nature and their tendency to disappear rapidly after being launched.

For the professional interested in document supply, the conference was interesting for three reasons: (i) the impact of grey literature in research and other environments was reinforced, journals alone fail to cover all information needs; (ii) most presentations revealed tools and/or collections useful for the discovery and supply of grey literature; (iii) the transition or move from hidden or priced resources to open (institutional or thematic) repositories is ongoing, even if the discovery of grey content is not necessarily facilitated by this evolution. -

The proceedings can be ordered in print or CD-Rom format through TextRelease. Selected papers will be published in *The Grey Journal*. The programme is freely available at: <http://www.textrelease.com/glpublications.html>

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GL10, the 2008 conference on grey literature will take place at the Science Park Amsterdam (NL), 8-9 December. The title is "Designing the Grey Grid for Information Society", the proposed session themes cover non-text and multimedia grey literature, primary data sets and metadata, the life cycle of grey literature and its impact on the information society, the challenges of born digital and web-based documents and research and education programs on grey literature. The first call-for-papers was published in February, and the final conference program will be available in June.

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